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# Pioneer Days in McPherson, Ka.

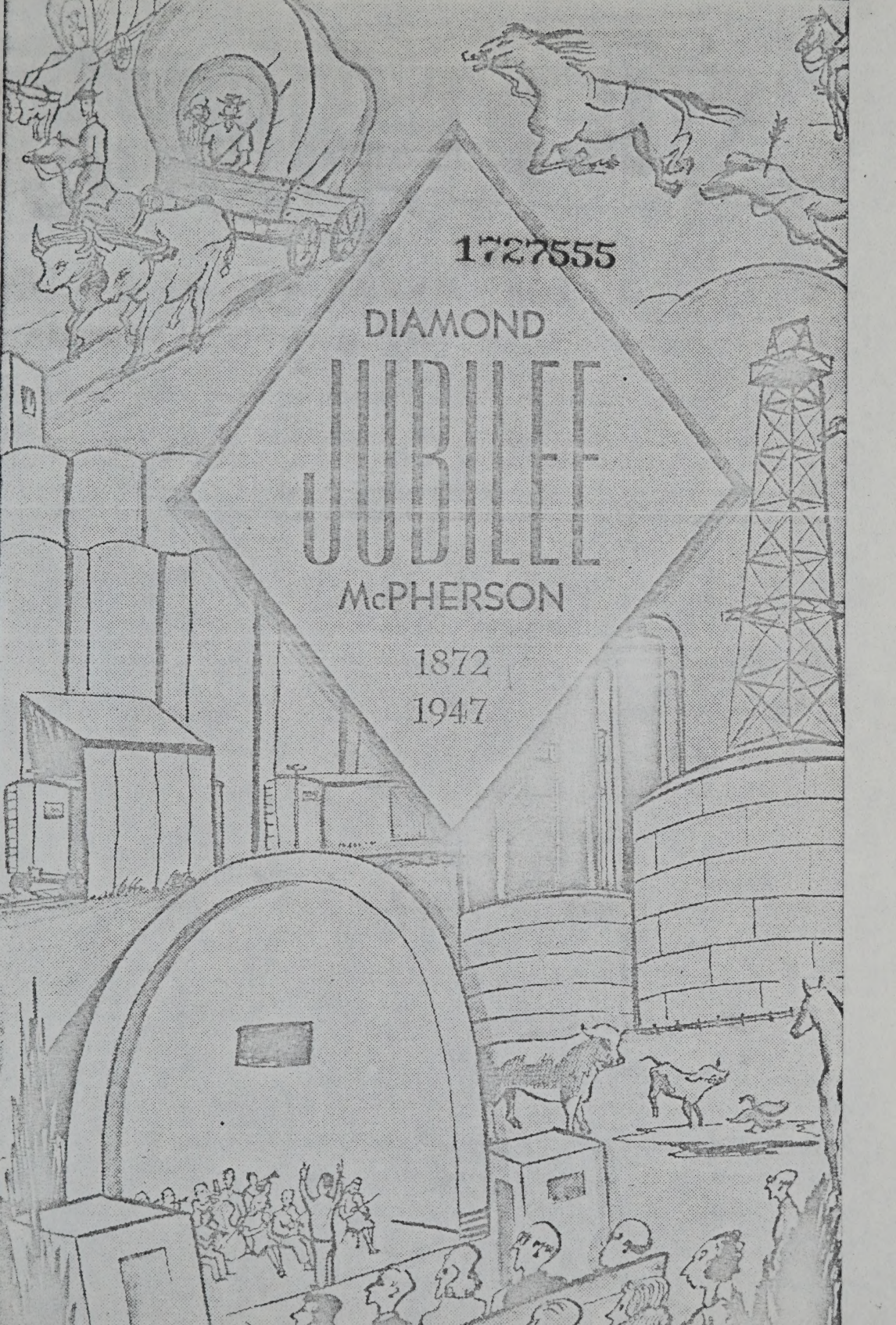
By  
JESSIE HILL ROWLAND

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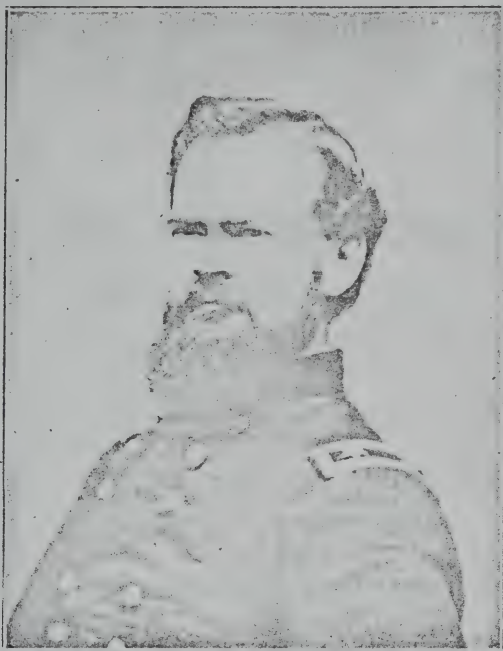
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DIAMOND  
JUBILEE  
McPHERSON

1872  
1947







## General J. B. McPherson The Man and Soldier

Major General James Birdseye McPherson, for whom McPherson was named, was one of the most promising generals of the Union army and at the time of his death was in command of the Army of the Tennessee.

He was born at Clyde, Ohio, Nov. 14, 1828, and owing to his father's failing health was thrown on his own resources at the age of 13. For years he worked as store boy, utilizing every spare moment to get an education. At nineteen he was named as cadet and graduated from West Point in 1853. He was employed by the government as engineer and at the opening of the war organized a company of engineers and got actively into the fighting. By extraordinary skill, ability and bravery he won such distinction that he rapidly rose from one post to the next until in March, 1864, he was given command of the Army of Tennessee.

In personal appearance McPherson was eminently prepossessing. He was six feet tall, of remarkable physical development, graceful carriage and pleasing manners. At the time of his death he was betrothed to a beautiful young lady in Baltimore, the union with whom had been postponed on account of the pressing demands of the Atlanta campaign.





## Preface

The author has experienced great pleasure in collaborating this short history and hopes she is not like a lady who as secretary of her study club thought it did not matter so much whether correct or not just so she made the minutes interesting. This could not apply to history of course, and yet in reading some books and articles along that line, I have had my suspicions.

After the Homestead Act was passed in 1862, many Civil War soldiers sat around their camp fires dreaming of the home they hoped to establish in the far west when the war would close. Of the 752 veterans that lived in McPherson county, some came before the county was organized in 1870 and many after the town of McPherson was located in 1872. It is not necessary to dwell on the merits of this group nor on the fine organization of the Grand Army of the Republic to which they belonged.

McPherson county has been most fortunate in having been settled in the north by the Swedes in 1868. A splendid, hardy and progressive people who came for no purpose but to found homes for themselves and future generations. The first thing these people did after locating was to organize churches and schools. And were these people religious? The author remembers well when a child of visiting the Swedish church in Lindsborg and seeing Pastor Swensson come forth to his pulpit, gowned in a black robe and he stood with all the dignity of a king viewing a great kingdom while the choir took their places. The songs were so devoutly sung they lifted one up to the very gates of heaven. The founding of Bethany college and the singing of Handel's Messiah by the students and many of the people of this little town during the Lenten season, has taken Lindsborg out of the "Main Street" class and made the Swedes distinctive.

The southern part of the county was settled in 1873 by the Mennonites who came from the southern part of Russia. Their forebears left Germany on account of the objectionable impressment





of their youth into the German army. Fearful that same conditions might obtain in Russia, they were attentive to agents who were sent over to induce them to come to free America and buy, for a small sum, large tracts of railroad land then being offered in Kansas.

Equally substantial as any group of people ever settling our county they were not idle educationally either for they immediately established schools and churches and from their idealistic thinking, Bethel college, Newton was founded.

Northwest of McPherson, in Jackson Township, a splendid group of Bohemians located. They too were home-makers, honest and industrious to the highest degree. They soon learned the English language and were anxious through the following years to give the best religiously and educationally to their children. Mr. and Mrs. Van Kubin, members of this group have a son, Colonel Milford T. Kubin, who is Supervisor of Public Health in Occupied Germany at this time. McPherson county is proud of his achievements.

Sandwiched in between these classes were the settlers from our older states. They too came to found homes for themselves and future generations to follow. They came with the true pioneer spirit to overcome every obstacle. Many were so fascinated with this wonderful western country—the vast prairies over which shine the gorgeous sunsets of summer; the glimmering, uncertain haze of autumn; the pleasing almost summer days until the first of the year, when our Kansas usually puts on a new garment of white and is loath to part with it until spring.

The locators of McPherson, Kansas, founded schools and churches at once and became the builders of a fine locality in which to live. We too have colleges. The McPherson college in which can be found almost any course appealing to present day youth. Also Central college founded in 1914 and is the property of the Free Methodist church.

When one considers McPherson having been located in 1872, on a vast rolling prairie without a tree or shrub as far as one could see—what wonders have been wrought.



Now as the collaborator of this short history nears the sunset of her existence here, she remembers well one morning standing outside our shanty on the homestead one mile northwest from the town and viewing a herd of antelope traveling from the northeast. Something arrested their attention and they came to a halt. Remaining motionless for a moment they continued on their way. Again during a mid-afternoon a horseman came dashing up to the shanty on the claim and excitedly inquired if we had any firearms. Mother was rather slow in answering such a question, when he pointed east to a buffalo quietly grazing on the slope. This was Mr. John Kinblade, a pioneer who afterwards brought the buffalo to bay near the spot where they made their home in after years on East Euclid Street.

Deep memories of some outstanding events seem to follow us, and how glorious it is to have been permitted to live through the early inception of a county or town, beholding the changes that according to present standards, make for ideal living.

JESSIE HILL ROWLAND









East Side Main Street, between Kansas Avenue and Marlin Street, 1880





# Pioneer Days in McPherson

BY JESSIE HILL ROWLAND

To Mr. L. G. Skancke of Salina, more than to any one else must be given the credit for the location of McPherson, Kansas. He was head officer in the government land office located at that time in Salina, Kansas. He discovered one day on looking over the maps, that land could be obtained in this vicinity for town site purposes. He confided this to some of his friends and he with R. H. Bishop, Oscar Seitz and J. T. Marlin, all of the same place started out to make a trip to this locality and took it over. Mr. Skancke had selected the west half of Section 28 and the east half of Section 29 for the location and at this time there were no trees or shrubs as far as one could see from this point selected—all practically level prairie and Andreas' History of Kansas tells us was called 'McPherson Flats.'

This quartette had hired an old stage driven by a Mr. Huber, and loading up with bacon, crackers, cheese, coffee, etc., they reached Lindsborg about 8 A. M. having started on this journey at 4 in the morning. They breakfasted and rested their horses then continued on their way crossing the Smoky Hill river, and it is quite possible on or near the spot where the Highway 81 bridge now spans the river, for in the description of their route Andreas speaks of their following the section line, and in that case it would be mostly identical with the ground covered by Highway 81 at the present time.

When crossing the Smoky Hill river, just as the old stage left the bank over it tipped and men, horses, crackers, cheese and bacon were in confusion. Mr. Marlin and the driver, who were on top of the coach were dumped into the river, and escaped by floundering around up to their waists in water. The inside passengers were in quite a predicament for the old stage filled with water and they had to work fast to make an exit. Mr. Skancke crawled out of the back window. This is the only accident that marred the harmony of the journey to McPherson. After taking an inventory of their cargo the party proceeded to Paint Creek where their number was increased by J. R. Fisher and T. E. Simpson.

When about six miles north of the present site of McPherson they tied a handkerchief to the front wheel of the old coach to mark its revolutions and compute the distance, they followed the section line and at noon found themselves in the center of the pro-





East Side Main Street, between Elizabeth and Kansas Avenue





posed town site. They organized and called the place McPherson Center.

In the meantime the Ashtabula, Ohio, colony having located King City just south west of the present town of Elyria had in mind making King City the county seat. They were greatly disappointed when the Legislature cut off a tier of townships from the south of McPherson county and added them to Harvey and Reno counties. This they knew would throw them too far south from the center of the county to hope much for their town, much less to make it the county seat which was at this time located at Lindsborg. This location they considered too far to the north of the county to hold this distinguished honor, consequently a number, especially those who had not used their homestead rights sought land near the center of the county. A number of these having heard of the intended location of our town by these Salina people, were asked to join them in their Company and May 28, 1872 the Articles of Incorporation were signed by the following 12 men: L. G. Skancke, Oscar Seitz, J. T. Marlin, R. H. Bishop. These were from Saline county and the following eight from McPherson county: T. E. Simpson, Solomon Stevens, H. J. Woodside, John W. Hill, H. A. Hendry, J. B. Haight, Landon Raff, J. R. Fisher. They called their organization "The McPherson Town Company" and being legally organized were ready for business. They appointed Solomon Stevens, one of their number to apply for the two quarter sections of land allowed by government for town site purposes. Every part and parcel of this land passed through his hands and the date of release by him to the McPherson Town Company was February, 1875.

#### THE TOWN IS LAID OUT

The first thing to be done was to lay it out into lots and blocks. Accordingly J. D. Chamberlain, county surveyor at that time was hired to do this and make a plat of the town. Mr. Chamberlain was paid \$48 for his survey and plat.

Even before the streets were named men were hired to dig a well at what is now the intersection of Main and Kansas Avenue. This well was filled up when the Street car line was built after filing for a charter in 1886. The well was about eighty feet deep and was dug by hand. A windlass was hoisted over the hole when too deep to throw the dirt out to the top and a bucket attached to a rope wound around the windlass was raised and lowered into the well to carry the dirt out until the well was completed. A very laborious way we would say now a days with all our modern machinery





West Side Main Street between Marlin and Euclid Streets, 1880





to make wells. Because the windlass squeaked so, when this particular well was being dug, one of the men was asked why he did not grease it with a bacon rind to which the party replied, "Because we don't have any to spare at our house, we eat ours all up." This well was used by farmers several miles around and the water was carried mostly in barrels to the various homes for family use. Some of the pioneers not possessing horses and a wagon used an ox-team instead, hitched to whatever vehicle they happened to have. From the Town Company minutes we find the expense of digging this well was \$47 besides \$10 for two loads of stone that were used in the bottom of the well for curbing.

#### FOUNDERS WERE FORESIGHTED

We cannot but wonder at the vision our original fathers had when we consider the many plots of ground that were set aside by them to be used for churches, schools and parks and the two blocks also for county buildings. The old court house was built by them at a cost of \$1,500—a square building that stood where the McCourt hotel now stands and was destroyed in 1883 when the Union block was burned. This old building was erected even before the county seat was moved from Lindsborg to this place, being completed in February, 1873.

It might be interesting to know how our streets were named. From the original minutes of the Town Company we find this: "July 6th, 1872. On motion of J. T. Marlin, the center street running north and south be called Main Street. The first street



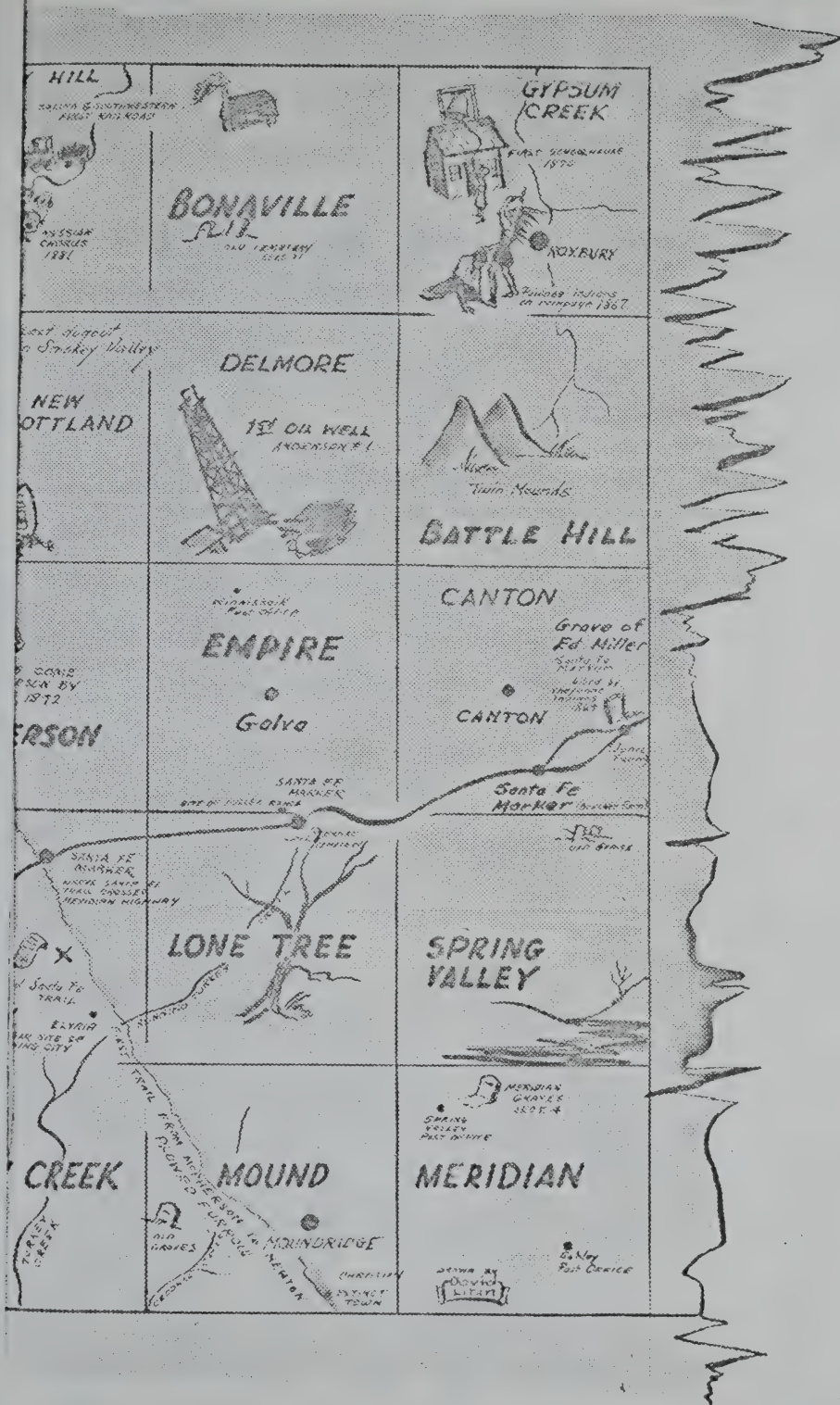
The H. H. Bowker Pioneer Store,  
First building in McPherson

















East Side Main Street, between Marlin and Euclid Streets, 1880



west be called Maple street. The second street west, Walnut. The third west, Chestnut. The fourth west, Locust. The fifth west, Mulberry, and the sixth west, Elder street.

The first street east of Main be called Ash. The Second, Elm. The third, Oak. The fourth, Tulip. The fifth, Cottonwood. The sixth, Poplar.

Main street to be planted with four varieties; elm, walnut, maple and linden. Each of the above named streets to be planted with the variety of trees after which they were named.

On motion it was carried that the center street running east and west be called Kansas Avenue. On motion the remaining twelve streets to be named after the Incorporators or such name as the Incorporator suggests instead of his own. Upon allotment the first north was called Olive street, the second Hill, the third Woodside, the fourth Simpson, the fifth Euclid, the sixth Marlin, the seventh Elizabeth, the eight Sutherland, the ninth Skancke, the tenth Bishop, the eleventh Seitz, the twelfth Haight.

#### TOWN GROWS FAST

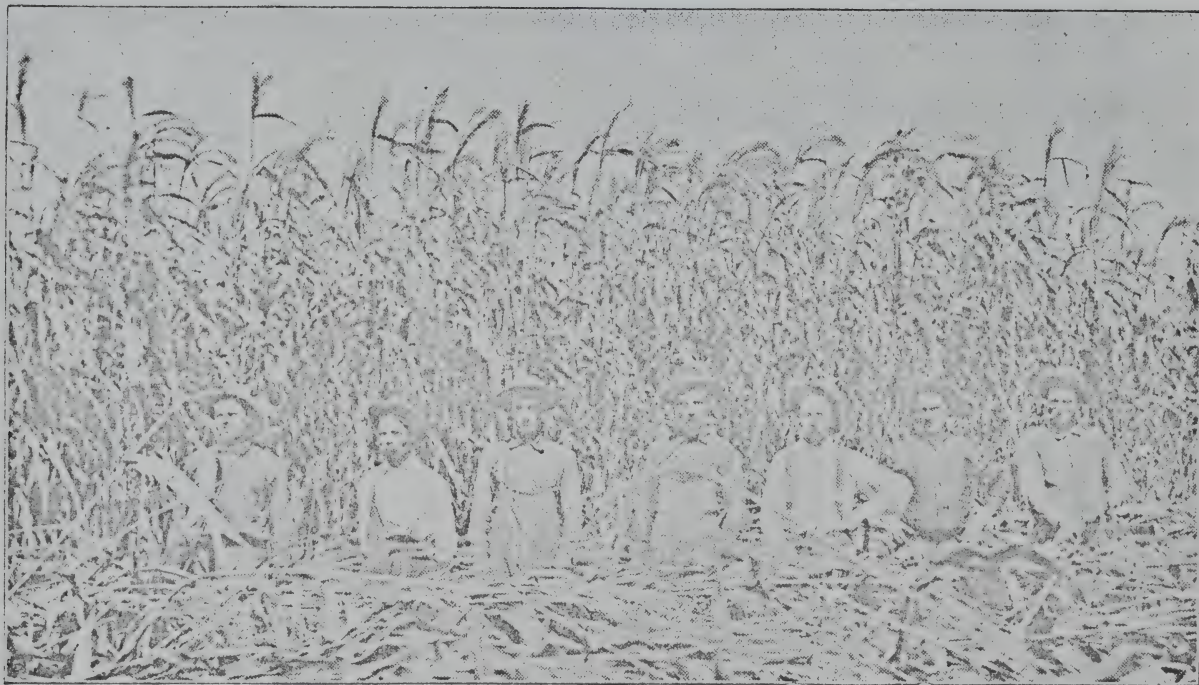
Six months after McPherson Center was located there were 25 houses on the town site and from its inception its location seemed logical and its growth assured. The locators were anxious to bring the county seat from Lindsborg to this town. One reason of course was its central location in the county and in the original minutes of the Town Company we find dated "August 10th, 1872—On motion it was resolved that a petition should be drawn up and presented to the people of McPherson county for the purpose of removing the county seat from Lindsborg to the town of McPherson." The petition was granted by the county commissioners, and June 10th, 1873 was set for the contest. The petition was signed by 483 voters. On the day of the contest McPherson received 605, New Gottland 325 votes, King City 3 and Lindsborg 1. McPherson's majority over all was 276.

#### THE GRASSHOPPERS COME

In 1874 McPherson county was visited by the grasshoppers. They came in dense clouds from the sky and ate up every thing before them. Even the pioneers' clothing if it happened to be hanging on the line disappeared. One lady told of a hat belonging to her little daughter. She had hung the hat out on the clothes line and when she went to get it only the round wire that marked the outer rim of the hat was left. Corn fields as high as a man's head were speedily devoured. The pioneers had a tough time of it that year







BROOM CORN, Once the leading crop in McPherson, is being harvested by the group in this early picture. One of the earliest crops to be planted, it was an important cash crop of the pioneers, even before the days of our modern wheat farming.



and quite a number, discouraged returned East. Never in our Nation's history has her own been neglected in time of disaster. Car loads of food and clothing were sent for distribution to the needy and there were very few who did not need help. The next year was the best ever. Every seed placed in the ground grew and again the pioneers started on the road to prosperity.

### BECOMES A CITY

McPherson was incorporated as a city of the third class March 4, 1874, upon a petition presented to Judge J. M. Prescott by T. E. Simpson. The first election was held March 16, 1874 and the first officials of McPherson were Solomon Stevens, mayor; H. Bowker, C. E. Pierce, Wm. West, W. B. McCord, M. P. Simpson, councilmen.

### THE FIRST CHURCH

The first corner stone laid for a church was laid by the Baptists in September, 1874. The first contract for a school building was let to B. S. Bonney for \$1,200 in 1875. The land upon which the building was erected was deeded by the McPherson Town Company to District 20 and was located where the East Park school house now stands. The first teacher in McPherson was Miss Hattie Swafford who taught through subscription. Mrs. Wallace Gleason was the second teacher but the first to draw her salary from the public school funds.

McPherson was made a city of the second class in 1883 and Geo. L. McCourt was the first mayor under that statutory ruling. A very good picture of Mr. McCourt hangs in the lobby of the McCourt hotel.

Fortunately for the towns located in McPherson county at its early inception the agrarian population at once began turning over the virgin soil and by their industry caused the prairies to blossom with wealth of agricultural products. In 1877 McPherson county led every other county in the state in the amount of wheat and broom corn and the total value of field products amounted to \$1,631,840. The population March 1st, 1877 was 9,417. There were 72 school houses and not one drinking saloon in the county and not a dollar of county indebtedness.

### THE RAILROADS COME

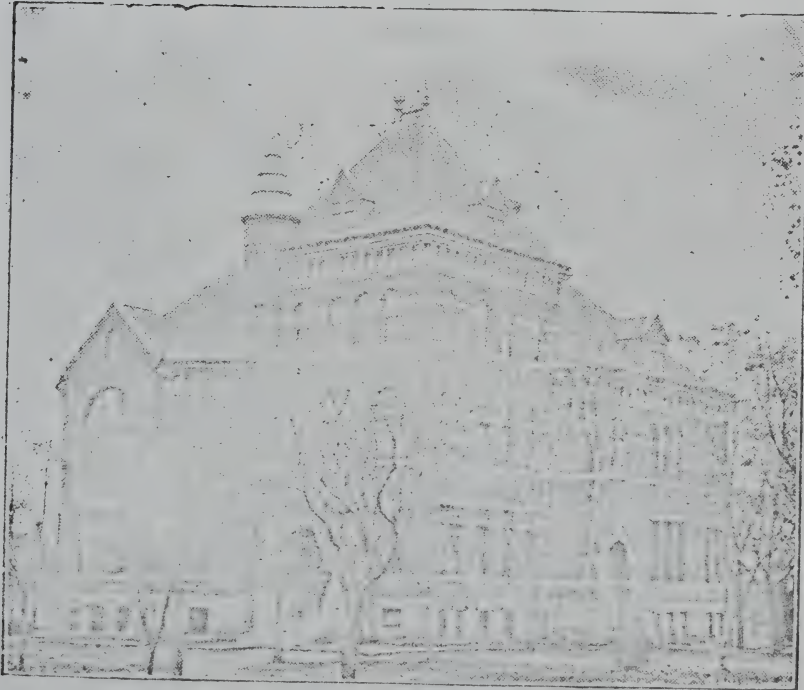
In the Autumn of 1879 the Santa Fe railroad extended a branch from Marion to Ellinwood by way of McPherson and in December of the same year the Union Pacific extended an arm from its main





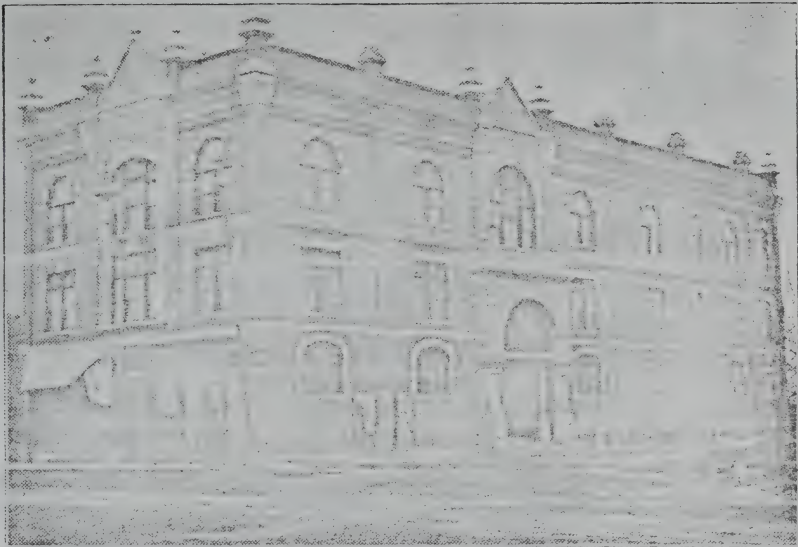


East Side School, which stood on the site of the present Junior High School.



The old High School, which stood on the site of Wickersham School.





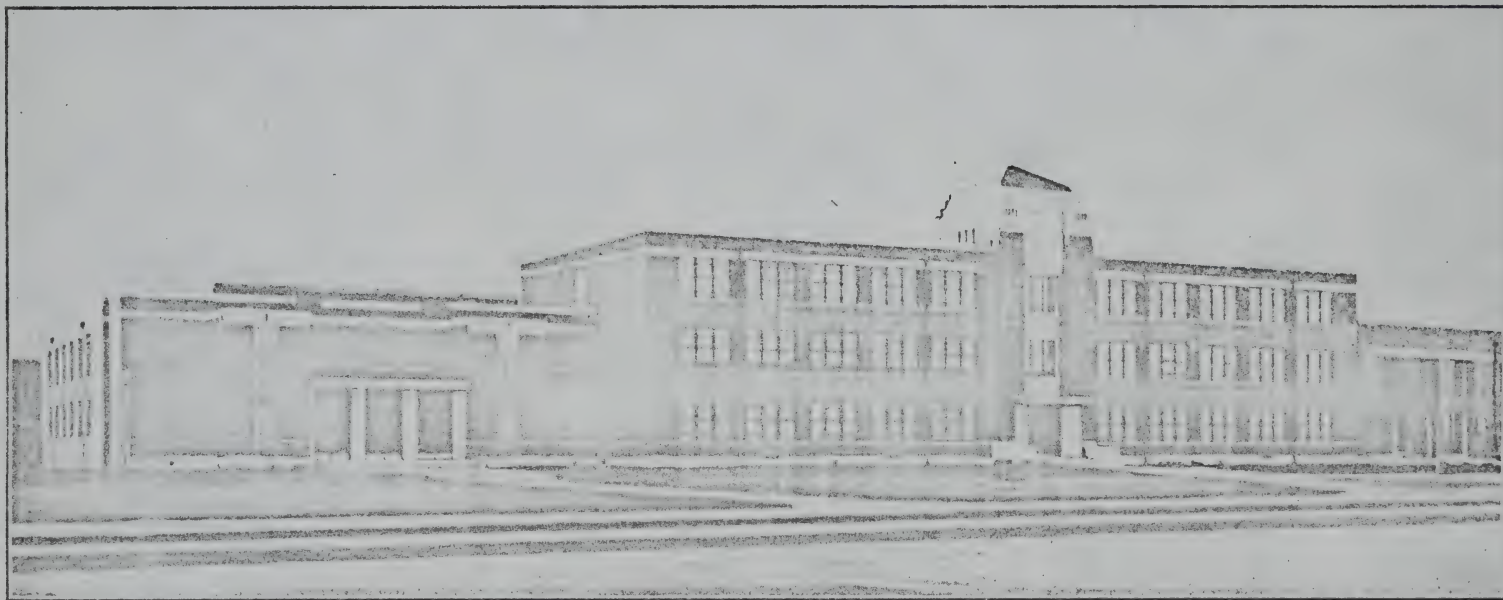
The Opera House, still standing, was one of the outstanding structures built in the boom of the 80's.

The First National Building, below, is not so well known as it burned in 1898. It was located on the site of the present Grand Building.









Senior High School, one of the outstanding high school structures of the State.



line in Salina. These roads pooled and divided their business. In 1888 the St. Louis, Fort Scott and Wichita (Now Missouri Pacific) entered McPherson November 1st. The advent of this road created a rivalry that soon led to active competition. In mid summer of the same year the Great Rock Island reached McPherson with a trunk line extending from Chicago to the City of Mexico. McPherson then had four independent railroads that brought her in to the direct markets of the East.

It is generally conceded that through the activities of these roads in Kansas a boom over the state was created. McPherson had its history in this and collapsed through land inflation and the small pox in March, 1888.

### OIL IS DISCOVERED

In 1926 oil was discovered in Delmore Township on the Anderson farm about eight miles north east, as the crow flies, from McPherson and it was said during the depression in 1932, McPherson was about the only bright spot in Kansas.

### AN IDEALISTIC TOWN

McPherson has always been a good town with idealistic people who founded churches, schools, colleges, libraries, parks, Y.M.C.A. and other organizations, each with its own interesting history. It has never been a cattle town nor had a boot hill cemetery. There have been very few saloons. I remember one and a group of women from the churches went each day and held a prayer meeting in this until it soon folded up and disappeared. We have had joints and speakeasies and bootleggers, but the sale of liquor was carried on surreptitiously and the knowledge of it was not brought so much before young people. Even in 1876 when McPherson had its first Fourth of July celebration, there was an estimate of 3,000 people who came here to celebrate and they brought 400 teams. The most remarkable feature of it all was that not a drop of liquor was sold or drank upon the grounds. Not a drunken man was seen all day nor was there the smallest quarrel or disagreement even in so large an assembly. My authority for this was taken from the McPherson Independent, edited by George McClintick at that time and now on file in the State Historical society building in Topeka.

Like the face of a good man or woman McPherson shows the fine spiritual substance of which it has been built and we only have to seek and we shall find the good, the beautiful and the true.







MAIN STREET TODAY



# McPherson Today

McPherson, a city of 8,000 people, is located midway between the geographical center and the population center of the State of Kansas. The average rainfall is 31 inches, the mean temperature 56.3 degrees, and the elevation is 1496 feet.

Here you will find most of those civic and recreational facilities so necessary for a well rounded life of enjoyable living. Outstanding among these is a large modern hospital, a convention hall with a large auditorium and a gymnasium which has banquet facilities for 600 people. The five beautiful parks have every facility for outdoor recreation. Among these are picnic facilities, baseball, tennis and swimming. The new bandshell is one of the largest in the state, and the new seashore swimming pool, with filtered and purified sand beach, is the only one of this type in this area.

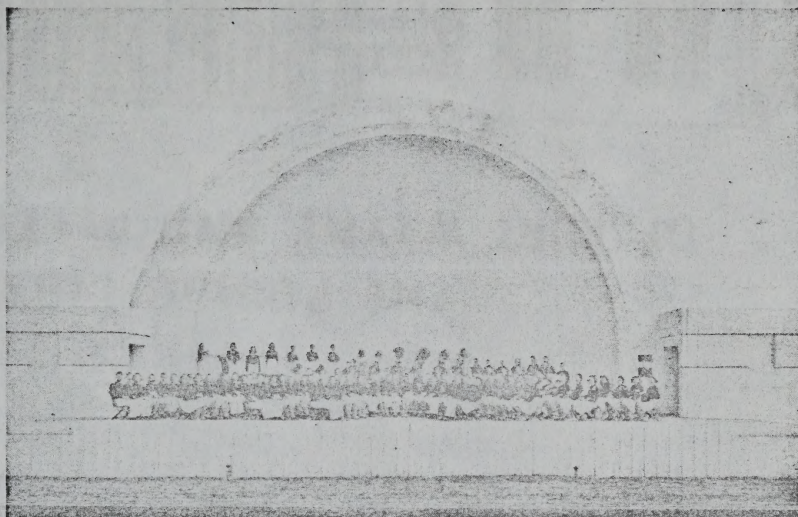
Federal Highways 81 and 50N, and State Highway 17, pass through this city. In addition, there are four railroads and excellent bus and truck line facilities. McPherson has three modern hotels, fine eating places and theaters. In addition to the modern public school system, one of the best in this State, two colleges are located here. McPherson College offers a complete four year college course and its work is fully accredited by all advance institutions of learning. Central College is a like qualified institution and offers a complete two-year college course. It is the oldest Junior College in Kansas.

McPherson is the business center for a territory which has a population of 40,000 people, and which is rich in agriculture and natural resources. The total value of farm products is about 20 million dollars annually. Field crops represent about three-fifths of this income, with livestock, milk and dairy products, and poultry products representing the balance. The natural resources exceed ten million dollars per year. This has developed a city with a retail volume of over 10 million dollars annually. The two hundred retail and service firms have 600 employees and the yearly payroll is over one-half million dollars.

The principal industries are oil refining, flour milling, cheese making, cement products, and insurance. The 750 employees engaged in these industries have an annual payroll of nearly 1 million dollars per year. Several hundred more employees are engaged in the oil and gas industry and their payroll adds another one-half million dollars to the resources of McPherson.







Band Shell, Lakeside Park



Swimming Pool, Lakeside Park







